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29 January 1976
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MEMORANDUM FOR: Verification Panel Working Group
SUBJECT : Evaluation of Soviet Backfire Performance
Claims

MORI/CDF per C02418732

Attached in response to tasking at the Verification Panel Working Group meeting of January 26 is an evaluation of Soviet Backfire performance claims. With the exception of the last paragraph, it reflects the views of both CIA and DIA.

DIA review(s) completed.

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Chief, SALT Support Staff

Attachment
As Stated

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Attached to TS Letter 03/28/1976
45-47-E39C3

SUMMARY

The performance characteristics attributed to the Backfire by official Soviet sources have been analyzed. They are found to be generally consistent with current engineering estimates of Backfire performance if certain operational parameters are assumed. The only real inconsistency noted is the claimed 2400 km (1300 nm) operational radius for an all-subsonic flight at a 15,000 meter (49,000 ft) altitude. This altitude is significantly above Backfire's subsonic, non-afterburning operational ceiling except at very low gross weights. Because of ambiguity in the data provided, we have learned little to confirm or refute current engineering estimates of the Backfire's 5000 km (2700 nm) range capability on high-altitude, subsonic cruise missions.

ANALYTICAL LIMITATIONS

The Backfire performance data provided by the Soviets does not provide the basis for determination of an intercontinental capability, or lack of it. Terms in which the data is reported, such as "official maximum operational radius", "intermittent supersonic and subsonic speeds" and "minimal" or "maximal" payloads, are not meaningful terms in any technical sense. We have applied our interpretations of these terms and have used our best estimates for gross weight, fuel weight and wing sweep angle to assess the performance data reported. In addition, our estimates are based on the use of cruise climb procedures -- a standard Soviet practice.

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Backfire Deployment

There are nine, possibly eleven, Backfires at Poltava, an operational Long Range Aviation base in the Southwestern USSR.

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There are eleven, possibly seventeen Backfires at Oktyabrskoye, an operational Naval Aviation base on the Crimean Peninsula.

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The Soviets are replacing Badger intermediate-range bombers with Backfires at Poltava and Oktyabrskoye. Prior to the delivery of Backfires to Poltava, there were two regiments at the airfield, with a total of some fifty-five Badgers. Presently there are about forty Badgers and either nine or eleven Backfire at Poltava. Prior to the delivery of Backfires to Oktyabrskoye, there was a single Badger regiment of about twenty-five aircraft. Presently there are about fifteen Badgers and either eleven or seventeen Backfires at Oktyabrskoye.

The disposition of the Badgers that were formerly stationed at Poltava and Oktyabrskoye is not currently known. The Soviets may have retired these aircraft, or they may have redeployed them to other intermediate-range bomber regiments.

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Constraints On Intercontinental Capability

We see nothing in Secretary Brezhnev's statement about Backfire performance which translates into guarantees on intercontinental capability. We reach this judgement based

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